

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

Annual Subscription: \$3.00

17, ROUTE DE MALAGNOU, GENEVA

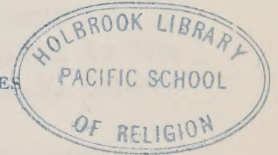
Printed in the U. S. A.

297 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 10

Tel.: GRamercy 5-3475 — Cable Address: "Worcil"

under the auspices of

the WORLD COUNCIL of CHURCHES (in process of formation)
the INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL
the WORLD ALLIANCE for INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE CHURCHES
the WORLD ALLIANCE of YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS
the WORLD'S YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
the WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION
the WORLD COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



The aim of the Ecumenical Press Service is to keep its readers informed of trends of thought and opinion in and about the Churches and Christian movements. It is therefore not to be held responsible for opinions expressed in its news items.

No. 21

Fifteenth Year

May 28, 1948

One Department of the World Council is about to Cut Down its Work

The Ecumenical Commission for the Chaplaincy Service to Prisoners of War met in Geneva on May 20th to hear various reports concerning the position of the prisoners of war in the countries where they are still detained, and certain problems connected with safeguarding their interests.

Owing to the continuous reduction in the number of prisoners of war, and the approaching end of captivity in general, the members of the Ecumenical Commission decided to reduce the work of their Commission to the minimum by the end of this year, and to transfer to the Refugee Division any responsibilities which might still be incumbent upon it. It was proposed that a more limited "Commission for Prisoners of War" be set up with the task of keeping in touch with the international organisations interested in the question, representing the World Council in any conversations relating to the lot of prisoners of war, and if necessary presiding over the organisation of a new department for the chaplaincy service to prisoners of war.

The attention of the Commission was drawn to various difficult problems, such as the fate of prisoners who have been liberated but are unable to rejoin their families, because the latter are held up in Eastern Europe. Other problems were: religious assistance to prisoners condemned to prison or detained in preventive custody; the uncertainty of many prisoners (especially in some countries in the East of Europe) with regard to their repatriation; the maintenance of ecumenical contacts with prisoners who have been repatriated or liberated as voluntary civilian workers in the country where they were detained. A resolution was passed emphasising the responsibility of the Churches towards these disinherited people and asking them to provide means for spiritual help to these men.

The meeting was attended by some representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which enabled the Commission to examine and discuss the (new or revised) Draft Conventions for the protection of war victims. These Draft Conventions were prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross for its XVIIth Conference, to which the Ecumenical Commission is to send a representative.

In his closing remarks, Professor J. Courvoisier, President of the Commission, recalled the excellent spirit of collaboration which has always existed between the Ecumenical Commission and the other international organisations for aid to prisoners of war. He particularly thanked the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. for the help which they had so often given to the Ecumenical Commission.

E.P.S. Geneva

NETHERLANDS

A Church Message on Communism

The General Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church has issued a message on Communism, which was read from all pulpits on Sunday May 23. We quote the following:

"In the midst of the terrors of the war years the Church stated in several messages that national socialist ideology is diametrically opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"With equal clarity it must now be proclaimed that Communism, as it is nowadays forced from Moscow upon the peoples and as its unscrupulous methods are revealed, is also a direct contradiction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Those who are tempted by Communism because they long for social justice should know that it is rooted in an absolutely objectionable doctrine according to which the human will and human action are entirely determined by social forces. As it manifests itself now, it demands complete commitment to human powers, which are not subjected to God, but which usurp His place in demonic pride. Its doctrines teach unrestrained violence.

"The Church of the Reformation regards the choice between 'Moscow and Rome' as a temptation of this world...But if the Church is to speak thus in obedience to the Holy Scriptures it must be made clear that Christians themselves have not heard the Word of God in the right way and have not rendered a faithful witness to Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church and the only Lord of the world. Those who would call themselves Christian have reason to be deeply disturbed by the realisation that in Communism outstanding debts are being presented to them. How many un-Christian teachings and actions are covered up by Christian phraseology! How much actual injustice has been taken for granted! How blinded we are by bourgeois conservatism! How great is the opposition to necessary social reforms! How often is the basis of the kingdom of God trampled upon: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. How little is the name of Christ openly confessed as the only name by which the world is judged and saved!

"We Christians have sinned in allowing the Bible, of which God gave us fresh understanding at the Reformation, to be pushed out of public life. Therefore we are responsible that the way has been opened for pagan ideologies.

"The appeal of Jesus Christ should therefore be heard in the Churches again: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'.

It is a great temptation for Christians, in these days full of menace and tension, to seek their only support and safety in powerful secular organisations. God's Word should therefore now be heard more clearly than ever before: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit'... The true Church of Christ knows that it will have to suffer oppression in this world. It feels united with the Church militant in all countries.

"Instead of becoming involved in wordly anxieties it is to be a witness of Jesus Christ and His kingdom, of His death and resurrection. The Church is to live triumphantly because of the victory of Jesus Christ. In no case must it allow anyone to rob it of its liberty which has been given by Christ. Therefore it must not only raise its voice against Communism, but also against every form of society in which labour has become merchandise and man has been sacrificed to the desire for profit."

E.P.S. Geneva

U.S.S.R.

Interview with Patriarch Alexius

"Les Nouvelles Russes", a weekly paper published in Paris, reproduces an interview (May 21st) granted by Patriarch Alexius to a Reuter correspondent.

Concerning the relations between Church and State, the Patriarch declared once again that the Russian Church enjoyed the benevolent support of the Soviet Government, which is following its activities "with close attention".

The Patriarch then replied to a number of questions, the first being whether the Church enjoyed complete freedom in organising its internal affairs. "Yes", replied Patriarch Alexius, "that is an inalienable right, which is widely used by the Church".

- "Can you say that religious freedom exists in Russia?"

- "Religious freedom is guaranteed by the Soviet constitution."

- "How many Christians are there in Russia? Have their numbers increased since the beginning of the war?"

- "As the result of the separation of Church and State and of the granting of religious freedom, we have no lists of church-members, as we used to have. A great deal has been written in the foreign press about the number of people who go to church and who fulfil their religious duties. I may add that the number of parishes has not decreased; on the contrary, it increases in proportion to the number of churches opened."

- "What is your opinion of Stalin as head of the Soviet people?"

- "In this form your question has nothing to do with the position of the Church. The fact that Marshall Stalin is the outstanding chief of the Soviet people is known all over the world, not only by the friends but also by the enemies of the U.S.S.R. The only thing that can be added is that the Church receives benevolent support from Stalin."

- "Is there any conflict between the theory and practice of Communism on the one hand, and religious beliefs on the other?"

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E.P.S. Geneva

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"This question is not clear. The Orthodox Church is not in conflict with anybody within the Soviet State."

"Has the Orthodox Church today sufficient Bibles and other liturgical books at its disposal?"

"The demand is being met to an increasing extent. We are planning to increase the publication of religious and liturgical books which are indispensable to the Church and to Christians."

E.P.S.Geneva

LATVIA

Lutheran General Synod in Riga

The "Evangelische Pressedienst" in Bethel-Bielefeld, (May 20, 1948) describes the meeting of a General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Republic of Latvia, after sixteen years' interruption. The conference was attended by 45 delegates, all the provosts and pastors of the Lutheran Church in Latvia, and over 2,000 church members. The Synod opened with a service of dedication in the Cathedral of Riga. Gustav Turs, a Latvian clergyman, was elected bishop.

E.P.S.Geneva

DENMARK

Ordination of three Women Pastors

On April 29th in the Cathedral of Odense, three women were ordained for the first time as pastors of the Danish Church (see E.P.S. No. 16). The ordination was presided over by Bishop Øllgaard, who preached a sermon based on Matthew 28:5-10 - the message given by the angel to the women concerning the risen Christ.

Bishop Øllgaard emphasised the fact that the message of Jesus' victory over sin and death was given first to the women who hastened to the tomb on Easter Morning. "The first people who heard of Jesus' Resurrection and of the empty tomb were women... and these women were the first to be sent to tell the Easter message to the disciples. One of the old Church Fathers called the women at the tomb 'Evangelists' and so they were. And these women were the first to worship the Risen Lord... Who then sent them out to the disciples with the same message, as they had heard from the angel."

Referring to the lively discussion which the ordination of the three women pastors has aroused in Denmark, Bishop Øllgaard declared: "The people who are worried or angry about what is happening here today say, that the angel only gave the women a message; he did not entrust them with an office, a permanent vocation... We agree that there was no mention of an office, and that it would be artificial and unnatural to expect him to do so. For that would mean inserting the problem of a later period in the modest account of Matthew's Gospel. On the other hand we know that the women did not confine themselves to giving the message to the disciples, but that they kept on repeating it over and over again; the Christian community needed the women in order to hear what they had seen... That is why we even know their names. But we ask you: Isn't it strange, that when we preach the Gospel we do so as if the text read, 'then the angel said unto the men, Go quickly and tell the disciples'. It is time we remembered that the text reads: 'The angel answered and said unto the women', and that we enable women to carry out this commandment not only in the school and in the home but also in the Christian community of Jesus' Disciples, as the angel instructed them...

"The Easter story", Bishop Øllgaard continued, "is just as applicable today as it was then. That is why I, a man, hear the message of the angel as a commandment, which I must obey... And you three women here must hear the words of the Easter message as if it were addressed to each one of you... and must spread the joyful message of the Resurrection in your daily work. And the administration of the Sacraments is a part of that message; there is no stronger proof than Baptism and Sacrament that Jesus lives. Remember these words from the Gospel of St Matthew; they will always remind you not to preach what people would like to hear, but only the message of the crucified and risen Lord..."

E.P.S. Geneva

PALESTINEJerusalem YMCA Building Housing Women, Children and Refugees

Arrangements have just been completed between the International Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. for the use of the splendidly equipped Jerusalem Y.M.C.A. building as part of a scheme for the housing of women and children and of refugees during the present crisis in Palestine.

To make this possible the Church of the Brethren, the Society of Friends, the Mennonites and the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A.s of the United States and Canada have offered financial help to the extent of \$60,000 for a period of six months' emergency operation.

Alvah L. Miller, for 15 years general secretary of the Jerusalem Y.M.C.A., has remained in Jerusalem. He and his staff have been asked to undertake responsibility for organising this important relief undertaking under the general leadership of the International Red Cross in Jerusalem.

E.P.S. Geneva

BURMAFreedom of Conscience

An interesting ceremony took place in Burma on Sunday, April 25th, when representatives of the Burma Branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society presented the Loyal Address to the President of the Union of Burma, and copies of the Bible to the President, the Speaker, the Prime Minister and Ministers.

In his reply H.E. the President said that it was gratifying to note that people of different races and creeds were giving their unstinted and whole-hearted support to the Union Constitution, which guaranteed to them all freedom of conscience and the right to profess and practise their religion freely and without hindrance. Although the Union Constitution accorded to Buddhism a special position as the majority religion, it recognised at the same time other faiths besides Buddhism. It thus embodied a democratic principle not only in political and constitutional matters, but in the domain of belief and conscience; and in the implementation of this principle of complete spiritual and religious tolerance lay one of the firmest foundations of the country's freedom and independence.

The President paid tribute to the work of such organisations as the Bible Society and said that in the task of rehabilitating the conscience and inner-spirit of man religious and cultural organisations all over the world were in a position to render inestimable assistance. He asked the officials of the Society to accept a copy each of the "Zinnatha-Paksani", a standard work on Buddhism containing an account of Buddha's life and teaching.

E.P.S. Geneva

The United Nations and the Non Governmental Organisations

Recently a Conference was called in Geneva of the non-governmental organisations in consultative status with the Social and Economic Council of the United Nations. Amongst the fifty organisations present were the World's Y.W.C.A., the World Y.M.C.A.s and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. Speeches were heard from some of the officials of the United Nations, and an opportunity given for discussion of the cooperation that exists both with the Social and Economic Council, and with the different Agencies. Two full days were given to a discussion on the draft Declaration and Convention on Human Rights (see E.P.S. No. 47, 1947), and a large number of suggestions put forward both for these documents themselves, and for their implementation. The delegation from the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs took a prominent part in the meeting, one of its members being a Vice-Chairman, and another Chairman of one of the Committees.

An interim Committee was set up at the close of the Conference to see to the carrying into effect of the decisions taken, to arrange for a further Conference, and also to make proposals, which will be presented at this later Conference, for a permanent link between these organisations in consultative status with the United Nations, to serve their mutual interests in their relations with the United Nations.

E.P.S. Geneva

Church Youth of Eighteen Nations to Participate in Summer
Work Camps

Representative church youth of eighteen nations will "shovel dirt and pound nails together" this summer in the first international work camps sponsored by the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches.

Selected by interdenominational church committees in the various countries, the young people of varied denominations as well as nations will learn from one another while helping to build youth centres, a refugee community, an international school, or a children's village. Over 600 youth will take part in these summer service projects. Three hundred of the total number will cross borders to mingle with youth of another land, while three hundred will stay in their home country. Nearly half of the former group are from America, the other participants will come from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland.

In addition to the 600 youth mentioned above a much larger number of church youth is exchanged bi-laterally between church committees in two countries such as between Switzerland and Holland, Germany and Holland, France and Austria.

By and large, the international groups will join with the national group in a construction project which the church people have already begun. In the Italian Alps they will work with Waldensian youth to construct a youth camp known as "Agape". Waldensian youth returning from the war began this labour voluntarily in order to build a "monument to peace".

One work camp will be located in Vilbel near Frankfurt, in Germany, where refugees expelled from eastern Europe are building their homes from sun-baked clay bricks. Nearby is the church-fostered boys' town of former black-marketeers living

in a town of army tents. Other German projects involve the construction of a youth centre in Stuttgart and a student centre in Mainz.

At Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, work-campers will help complete the building of a secondary school of an international character and with a Christian emphasis. The Youth Department is cooperating with "Don Suisse" and other organisations in fostering the work camp at Annemasse, France, a short distance from Geneva. Beginning will be made on the "Village de l'Espérance" (Village of Hope), a French equivalent for the famous international Pestalozzi children's village at Trogen, Switzerland. Brief camps will also be held in Austria.

The World Council Youth Department contribution to these camps has been largely the recruitment of campers and leaders and provision of equipment. Half of the leaders are Europeans while half are Anglo-Americans since the latter have had more experience in work camp programmes. Major financial support for the international work camp programme has been provided by the Congregational Christian Service Committee in the United States, which also supplied the Youth Department with a director for the developing programme, Mr. Pitsker, a Methodist pastor.

E.P.S. Geneva

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Religion and Religious Education

On May 9, the new Czechoslovak constitution was proclaimed guaranteeing legal equality to all religious groups and the right to practise their religion freely, subject only to public order and good morality. Freedom of conscience is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to subscribe privately or publicly to any religious creed or to no religion. Everyone is free to carry on functions related to his religion or non-religion, provided that this is not abused for anti-religious purposes.

A new education law provides compulsory religious instruction in state schools for children from 6 to 15, unless parents object to such instruction. Religious education and its supervision is in the hands of church bodies, without encroaching upon the rights of the highest administrative authority of the Ministry of Education. In accordance with the proposal of the Churches, the curriculum of religious education has been drawn up by the Ministry of Education in accordance with standards of civil and religious tolerance.

E.P.S. Geneva

GREAT BRITAIN

Whitsunday Service of International Christian

Witness

For the eighth year in succession a service of international Christian witness was held in Westminster Abbey, London, on Whitsunday afternoon. The preacher this year was the Rev. Canon Leonard Hodgson, D.D. Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Oxford and general secretary of the World Conference on Faith and Order. Crowds gathered to see the representatives of the Anglican, Orthodox, Reformed and Lutheran Churches of the Continent and Overseas, who, at the invitation of the Dean of Westminster, took part in the procession witness. There were over ninety of them. The first lesson was read in the Yoruba tongue by the Rt. Rev. A.B. Akinyele, Assistant Bishop of Lagos, and the second lesson was in Polish by the Most Rev. Archbishop Sawa of Grodno. The text of the sermon was "As the Father sent me, so send I you".

E.P.S. Geneva

